The Planetary Series

Original Proposal

"It's a strange world. Let's keep it that way."

PLANETARY PROPOSAL
WARREN ELLIS

The Wildstorm Universe is just the obvious shiny surface of an Earth with superheroes. Go a little deeper, and you find strangeness and wonder on a planetary scale. There are people weirder and more marvellous than the WildC.A.T.S. or StormWatch, who simply prefer to operate outside the glare of world publicity. There are mad and beautiful things beneath the skin of the world we know, that you only see when you look at things on a planetary scale...

...and I'm not talking about X-Files stuff. Fun as it is, it's done to death. I'm talking about a world in the superhero genre whose only known heroes, for the most part, are sourced in conspiracy theory and hallucinated alien histories. What if, underneath all that, there was an entire classic old superhero world? What if there were huge Jack Kirby temples underground built by old gods or new, and ghostly cowboys riding the highways of the West for justice, and superspies in natty suits and 360-degree-vision shades fighting cold wars in the dark, and strange laughing killers kept in old Lovecraftian asylums... what if you had a hundred years of superhero history just slowly leaking out into this young and modern superhero world of the Wildstorm Universe? What if you could take everything old and make it new again?

Planetary are three people who walk the world for strangeness and wonder. Sometimes, ordinary people uncover things that are best left covered. Sometimes, things best left covered emerge into ordinary life and do not have the world's best interests at heart. These are the times when Planetary arrive, invited or not, and deal with the situation while learning from it, adding to their own knowledge of how this world really works. In every issue, they (and we) learn and see something new, something that evokes that old mythical Sense Of Wonder that so few people do any more...

Funded by an unknown figure, the near-mythical Fourth Man of Planetary (about whom conspiracy theories swirl in their hundreds -- he could be anyone from Bill Gates to Hitler), Planetary remain determinedly independent, to the extent where most governments and security agencies don't even know they exist. They're explorers, charting the unseen borders of a fantastic world.

PLANETARY is intended to be a break from the doom and gloom of STORMWATCH. Though PLANETARY will doubtless have its grim moments, and will certainly often have an atmosphere of mystery, the series will be as close to fun as I can get. It's about, as Alan Moore put it, "mad and beautiful ideas"; the sense of wonder, the feeling of marvellous secret things just beyond our field of vision, and the revelations and splendours and dangers and bastards tied up in it all...

THE CHARACTERS

Planetary are a three-person field team dedicated to both excavating the secret history of a 100-year superhero continuity that no-one knew existed, and dealing with its present-day incursions into the light of day all over the world. Planetary all have superhuman abilities; this is why they were chosen for the work, and this is why they are drawn to the work. These are all attractive people, in their own ways. I personally think it's important for superheroes to be glamorous. They are fantasies, after all, the fulfilment of wishes, and we want our fantasies to be sexy. Otherwise, why bother having them?

ELIJAH SNOW

Joins the team in #1, becoming the group's detective and interrogator. He's very old, in the way that Jenny Sparks is, but looks young. He's seen a lot, has a checkered history of working in intelligence/black ops, and is currently in hiding somewhere in the Mid-West. His bonus for joining Planetary -- and, at first, his only reason for joining -- is that all records of him will be erased from every database on the planet, even the secret ones. He's cynical, more than a little irascible, and no- one's friend. The dark years of the 20th Century have leached the joy of life out of him. PLANETARY is at least partly the story of Elijah Snow rediscovering the sense of wonder and rejoining the human race.

He has shortish white hair, eyes like chips of ice, is sharply handsome, favours expensive stylish white suits. And, like all of Planetary, he has a special ability. His is to do with cold. We'll play it subtle, low-key, but he controls temperature within his immediate area. Makes for creepy effect during interrogation, and action stuff too.

JAKITA WAGNER

The leader of the team. She's in her mid-to-late twenties, and joined Planetary as an antidote to boredom (she doesn't say what she was doing before -- we'll find out one day). She's very, very smart, and boredom is her mortal enemy. Planetary is the only thing that keeps her attention, which makes her lonely. Black hair cut into a Louise Brooks bob, wearing a variety of black leather catsuits; somewhere between Catwoman and a Mrs Peel for the Nineties. Mrs Peel is a good ref; she's an action hero of the old school, kicks arse in a serious way. She's unnaturally strong, runs at 120 mph, and has heightened senses; a huntress' skills.

THE DRUMMER

is the information man. Computers talk to him, phone lines hum through his head, televisions perform unnatural tricks just for him. In his early twenties, he's been working for Planetary since he was fifteen (which is a story in itself). Less likely to go into action than the others; he likes data better than guns. He's in it for the knowledge, the mad and beautiful ideas. Quiet, with a wry and cutting humour, and secrets of his own. It's always the quiet ones... Shorter than the others, head shaven and goatee & Œtache dark, his tastes run to grey jeans and jackets, and gaudy horrible patterned shirts. It's sad. Ewen McGregor in a superhero book.

FORMAT/APPROACH
PLANETARY will be told in self-contained single issues; think of each issue as a three-minute pop single.

Naturally enough, it'll be a regular Wildstorm superhero comicbook, with 22 pages of comics and use of the inside front cover for catch-up material.

It's important not to lose sight of the fact that PLANETARY, first and foremost, is a superhero comic. Despite the unusual intended nature of the covers (discussed below; basically, we treat each issue like a new single from a band, and so each cover will look unique in its own right), this will look and feel like a superhero comic. As you've seen, the protagonists are all superhuman. Each issue deals with a superheroic theme. But; we play each story like a very short movie. It'll be done completely straight, dialogue-driven, careful clear storytelling. Not dull storytelling; PREACHER has the straightest cleanest storytelling in monthly comics, but it don't look dull. The goal is simply to make the book read in as straightforward and easily comprehensible a fashion as possible while keeping the pages snappy and attractive. When we do an action scene, it's going to look like goddamned John Woo -- visually wild and incredible, but dead easy to follow and understand.

PLANETARY is tied into the Wildstorm Universe. We'll frequently see Wildstorm U characters on TV, in papers, appearing in the foreground while Planetary skulk in the background; all this to ground Planetary in the Wildstorm world, and to make clear that Planetary walk in the places the regular superguys never see. PLANETARY just doesn't work without the Wildstorm Universe there; without a known foreground, there cannot be an unknown background, that air of the mystery of lost superhero history cannot be sustained otherwise. It's entirely possible that Planetary will come face-to-face with Wildstorm characters at some point in the run.

The new-old superhero history PLANETARY slowly generates will be carefully laid so as not to clash or otherwise fuck with established Wildstorm continuity. Everything should dovetail neatly, slowly creating a whole new playing field. Like DIVINE RIGHT, like any decent major sf movie, we should end up creating a whole new world unlike any we've seen before, crack-full of infinite possibility... but also strangely familiar, as we dig out and play with classic superhero concepts in a new and hopefully fascinating way...

PRODUCTION AND THE COVERS (IMPORTANT)
I want PLANETARY to be the best-looking, most unusual-looking book Wildstorm does. This'll mean that we take a few risks with it, do a few things that the Conventional Wisdom doesn't allow for.

First off, something easy; the ancillary creators. I want MIKE HEISLER as letterer. Mike is greatly skilled, very inventive, rises to challenges, and does my placements for me. He'll pull off every mad and/or stupid thing I ask for, and he'll make it look better than it had any right to be, which means, in short, he makes me look like I know what I'm doing. I want LAURA DEPUY as colorist and computer effects witch/seperator. ("Witch" is not an insult -- it's the female for "wizard". Besides, can't you imagine how that'd look on a business card? "Laura Depuy, Computer Effects Witch.") Laura was worth her weight in gold on STORMWATCH, pulling off

every required stunt with great creative energy and panache. I'd like to see her coloring as well as seperating, if at all possible -- I think we speak the same language, and with her aboard, the book will look as it needs to. The bonuses in having colorist and seperator in the same body are obvious, as are the benefits of having colorist, seperator and letterer all in the studio. And I shall explicate the obviousness of those extras next, as well as making plain the requested situation's absolute necessity...

THE COVERS are a very important part of this book. It is intended that the covers be like no others in comics, and that PLANETARY will be a beautiful, unique and instantly recognisable object on the stands.

Simply put, the covers will change radically each issue.

Each cover will be put together according to its own distinct plan, which I'll write and otherwise spout on about. The logo will be moved, altered, shrunk, ghosted, warped and sometimes even removed completely, according to each cover's goals. Because each cover will speak directly to the issue's contents in a way that most covers don't. If we do an issue set in Hong Kong, the cover will look like a still from a Hong Kong movie. If we do an issue in Japan, then we'll look like the cover of a manga magazine. If we do a gothic horror issue set in England, then the cover will look like a Cocteau Twins CD. If Milan, then we'll look like Italian Vogue. You get the idea. No matter how much we change the cover design, people will still find the thing on the comics store racks, because it won't look like anything else. We will be recognisable simply by dint of being the one superhero book that isn't following the rules about cover design. It's the one that doesn't revert to six people standing on a rock in fighting position...

This will require the presence of the Letterer on each cover, in aiding and executing the designs. Sometimes easy -- when we do a photorealistic cover that looks like a letterboxed Hong Kong movie, and execute the titles and credits as a subtitle to the movie in the black space below the strip of "film", that day he will love us. Sometimes it ain't going to be that easy, though...

The Inside Front Cover might also change its design each issue. We'll see. The first issue's IFC will have another use -- I'd like a short introduction or foreword to be run there, to make better use of that space. With #2, backstory information and character precis' will be run there, but we don't need that for #1...

WARREN ELLIS
SOUTHEND
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